



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

THREE ARRESTED AFTER ICE AGENTS SEIZE MORE THAN 400 POUNDS OF COCAINE

SELLS, Ariz. – Three local residents are facing federal charges today after U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, assisted by the Tohono O’Odham tribal police and a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Border Patrol canine unit, searched a pickup truck in this small southern Arizona community yesterday and recovered one of the largest caches of cocaine ever seized here.

The 1987 Ford pickup truck containing the cocaine was parked outside a residence on the community’s north side. After receiving the consent of the home’s residents, Border Patrol agents ran the canine on the vehicle and the dog alerted to two concealed compartments built into the sides of the truck’s bed. Inside, agents found 406 pounds of cocaine.

The 44-year-old owner of the house, Arthur Pablo, returned home during the search and told officers the truck belonged to another Sells resident, Francine Joaquin, 34. Agents quickly located Joaquin and Duran Ortiz, 25, at Duran’s home. The pair told agents they had delivered the truck to Pablo’s residence earlier in the day.

Ortiz stated that Joaquin drove him to the border where the two located the truck containing the cocaine. Ortiz said his instructions were to drive the truck to Pablo’s house in Sells. Ortiz told agents that he and Joaquin were to be paid an unspecified amount by Pablo for delivering the truck, which would then be transported to Tucson on Pablo’s flatbed trailer.

“ICE will continue working with other law enforcement agencies to aggressively disrupt the trafficking of narcotics and to dismantle the criminal enterprises responsible for this activity,” said Kent Johansson, deputy special agent-in-charge of ICE’s office of investigations in Tucson.

Joaquin, Ortiz, and Pablo are in federal custody in Tucson and face charges of possession with intent to distribute cocaine. If convicted, the three face a maximum penalty of life in prison.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.